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Ag in the Classroom

United States
Department of
Agriculture

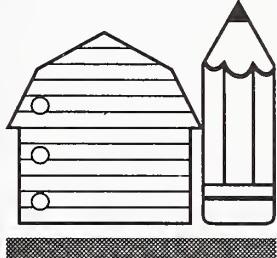
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Notes

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Focus on New England

This year's National Ag in the Classroom conference will be held in New England. The region has a rich agricultural heritage. This issue of *Notes* focuses on the people, programs, and materials that characterize Ag in the Classroom in this region.

Vermont: Master Gardening for Teachers

Vermont

Fourteen Vermont teachers are completing a unique graduate course that links basic horticulture skills to the new Vermont framework for standards and learning opportunities. Facilitated by Food Works, a Montpelier-based organization that helps schools create a pedagogy based on the unique natural and cultural heritage of each community, the 45-hour graduate course takes place at the Waits River School in Waits River, Vermont.

"From learning the basics of soil science and plant propagation to creating standards-based integrated science units, teachers gain hands-on experience for year-round growing, across-the-curriculum teaching, and lifelong learning," said Joseph Kiefer, education director and co-founder of Food Works.

During each of 15 classes, teachers are broken into developmental teams to design garden experiments that are linked to the state's new standards of learning for their own students. Teachers present their experiment findings to the group, explaining to their peers the objectives, how students will test the hypothesis, and assess and record data.

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Vermont teachers are learning to teach agriculture in their classrooms through a unique partnership with Food Works and Vermont Ag in the Classroom



From the Director:

With the national conference on the New England horizon in July, we are taking advantage of the opportunity to focus this issue of the newsletter on the programs in the New England area. This issue of *Notes* is somewhat unusual because we are spotlighting four teachers from the K-12 spectrum. These four delightful teachers are very effective in creating hands-on activities that appeal to students of all ages.

In order to bring you a program, teacher, or educational resource from each of the six New England states, we will be including neither

"Ag on the Internet" nor "Book Corner" in this issue due to space constraints.

If you have not yet pre-registered for the conference, let me remind you that the early deadline is June 6, 1997. I encourage you to reserve your room and send us your pre-registration to facilitate conference planning as soon as possible. We are all very excited to be offering another excellent program.

Elizabeth A. Wolanyk

Connecticut

Food For Thought

Although Connecticut was once known as the "Provision State," today few of the state's residents recognize the important role that agriculture plays in their daily lives. Bernie Kayan, state contact for Connecticut's Ag in the Classroom Program, says that agricultural literacy is especially important in an urbanizing state. "Life was once simpler, choices were fewer, and people were closer to the source of their food supply," she points out. "Today, too many people don't have the knowledge to make wise and thoughtful choices about nutrition, agriculture, and environmental questions."

Food for Thought, an activity guide for teachers and students, has been newly revised to help teachers and students understand more about agriculture in the state – a \$731 million industry. Activities are divided into four major categories – People and the Environment, Change and Continuity, Making a Living, and Agriculture and Technology.

Because environmental stewardship is such an important part of modern agriculture, the first set of lessons, People and the Environment, highlights environmental science. Students create their own rain gauge and graph the rainfall in their area. They investigate the effects of erosion on the land and learn how farming methods can reduce

Lessons on technology, the environment, agricultural history, and nutrition are part of Connecticut's Food for Thought.

erosion. They also learn about new low-input techniques – for example, monitoring insect populations and new technology cultivators – that will make farming even more productive and with less environmental impact.

Other sections focus on agriculture's history and help students understand the link between agriculture and technology. Students learn about nutrition as they study Connecticut's most important crops. They also have the opportunity to try their hand at several different types of agricultural production, from aquaculture to hydroponics.

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Food for Thought: 63

Agriculture and Technology

Square tomatoes Nonfat meals Low cholesterol eggs Plants grown without soil
Giantage stalks There will be changes in the food of the future, but even in a high-technology era, the staples of our diet will be produced by the farmer.

When you think of careers in agriculture, you may think only of the farmer plowing a field. However, there are job opportunities and career paths in agriculture in fields other than farming.

Today's farmer has to take advantage of new technology in order to survive economically and feed an ever-growing population. The United States needs about 400 new college graduates in food and agricultural science each year to fill professional positions. Our nation currently has a shortage of food and agricultural scientists, technicians, managers and marketing experts.

Meeting the challenge of feeding a growing population will depend on the talents of skilled food and agricultural scientists.

Spotlight

Connecticut

For Connecticut Teacher, Winning a Bulb Contest Makes Teaching Science a Dutch Treat

A gift of some Dutch bulbs had students at Immanuel Lutheran School in Bristol, Connecticut, literally digging into their classwork. First grade teacher Rozanna Stockman entered the school in the contest and then helped create activities that involved every child in the school in planning and planting the new school garden.

"I find it exciting and challenging to integrate agriculture into a mostly urban school setting," Stockman says. From singing growing songs to counting seeds to measuring the growth of a sunflower plant, students are actively involved in learning about agriculture as they learn other subjects. Agriculture is even a part of spelling lessons, as students eagerly learn to spell words like *observation* and *germination*.

"In my classroom you will find bags of dirt, flower pots, and lots of seeds," Stockman says. "I use all of these to inspire the children and teachers in our school to get their hands dirty."

When the school won the 200 Dutch bulbs in a contest sponsored by the Mail-order Gardening Association, the International Flower Bulb Center and the Dutch Bulb Exporters association, everyone in the school had to dig in. Every child helped dig flower beds, sift sand, remove rocks, and bury the bulbs outside. Older students used their math skills to design how the bulbs could be arranged in the 4-foot by 12-foot garden plot. "We had to figure out how many would fit in the ground and do all the

calculations," said seventh grader Sarah Mocker, "like how high and deep and how far apart."

A former "Minnesota farm kid," Stockman she has seen the benefits of agriculture first-hand – and wants to share those lessons with her



students. As a result, she plans lessons on agriculture throughout the year. In September, she took all the school's first graders to her own vegetable garden. "This led to many tasting, cooking, and nutrition lessons in our classrooms." Later, the class encouraged the school to set up a compost bin on the school playground.

Several years ago, Stockman asked her principal if he could get her a Grow Lab for her classroom. He ended up building a lab for each

From recording plant growth to planning a bulb garden, children experience hands-on science in Rozanna Stockman's classroom.

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Spotlight



New Hampshire

New Hampshire Teacher Brings the Farm to the Classroom

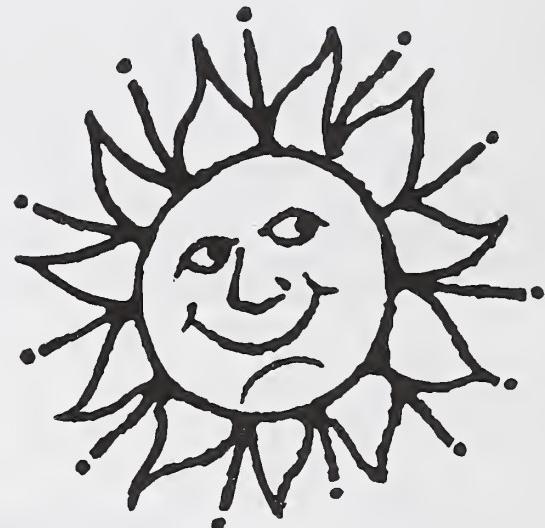
How can young children learn about agriculture? In Marion MacNeill's readiness classroom at Hampstead Central School, (a class for children who have attended kindergarten but are not developmentally ready for first grade), children use all their senses to learn about farm life.

MacNeill devotes much of her class time to storytelling, basing many of the stories on her own experiences. She grew up on a farm and often recounts her memories of "the work and fun of raising animals; of lying on the cow's back in the sun; of watching the garden crops grow and the pleasure of seeing a newly weeded row of beans or corn; of the knowledge that the animals depended on us and we could not shirk our responsibilities."

Arousing student interest through story telling opens the lines of communication and the door to learning. Although MacNeill's descriptions may romanticize farm life, they do get children excited about agriculture. "The children listen to my every word, trying to understand my enthusiasm for a life very different from most of theirs. At the same time, they are gaining more of an understanding of the agricultural life."

Once the stories have piqued the children's interest, MacNeill gives her students the opportunity to learn more about the realities of farm life. In the past, she used field trips to help her students experience agriculture. Over the past three years, bus costs have prevented her from taking students to the farm, so the farm, in whatever form, has to come to them.

She has brought many animals into her classroom. One parent brought a pair of lambs. She borrowed a pair of six-week-old pigs for a morning. (One was so noisy he was "suspended," she says,



adding, "but all the children in the school knew just how loud a piglet could squeal.") A pair of mice borrowed from the pet shop quickly became ten mice when the mother had babies. All ten were eventually adopted by families of the children in her class.

The class sprouted sunflowers on a paper towel so children could see the process of germination. They planted the seeds, which blossomed in the class's Grow Lab. They soaked peas to soften them for a craft project, but when the peas germinated the children decided to plant them instead. "We all enjoyed eating our home-grown peas," MacNeill reports.

Now MacNeill is planning an activity she learned from the Maine AITC program. This spring, she'll plant potatoes in big pots. When the children return to school in the fall, they'll be able to dig them up and eat them.

Because of her enthusiasm and commitment, MacNeill has been named New Hampshire AITC's Teacher of the Year. As part of her award, she will attend both the Regional AITC Conference held in Ithaca, NY, and the National AITC Conference held in Nashua, NH.

Contact Marion MacNeill at Hampstead Central School, 13 Emerson Ave., Hampstead, NH 03841.

Spotlight



New Hampshire

New Hampshire: Learning More About Sheep and Wool

Visitors to this summer's national Ag in the Classroom conference are sure to enjoy the state's scenic vistas, mountains, and valleys. But look a little closer and you'll see another feature of the New Hampshire countryside: "Covering the landscape," says Lynne Blye, state contact for Ag in the Classroom in New Hampshire, "you'll notice miles and miles of stone walls."

Those walls were built by previous generations of farmers who combined ingenuity and environmentalism. In the fields farmers wanted to clear, the rocks were an impediment to plowing. But by gathering the stones up and moving them to the edges of the fields, farmers could use these natural resources to build fences for sheep that have traditionally been a major source of meat in the state.

Dutch Treat from page 3

teacher in the school. That in turn led to a year-long effort to upgrade the school's science curriculum, emphasizing hands-on experiences.

"The more I see kids and fellow teachers, parents and grandparents getting excited and involved in our agricultural programs, the more dreams I have," Stockman says. In the near future,

Many of New Hampshire's early farms raised sheep until the Civil War. Then consumer tastes and lifestyles began to change. Mutton became less popular. The demand for wool dropped off as imports increased and the demand for wool clothing decreased as industry brought people inside to work.

Today's sheep and wool industry is smaller than in the past. However, the industry is still an integral part of New Hampshire agriculture. That is why New Hampshire Ag in the Classroom developed a Sheep and Wool Packet.

This resource package includes background information and student activities that focus on the history and characteristics of sheep and wool. Included are instructions for simple spinning, dyeing, and weaving of wool. Samples of wool and a small poster showing different sheep breeds are also included.

A 10-minute video, *Wool: From Farm to Fabric Naturally* is included with the kit. To order, contact Lynne Blye at (603) 271-3696. The charge for the kit is \$10 plus postage.

that will include using computers to contact other schools, inviting people in agriculture-related occupations to visit the school, and creating a friendship quilt with another class.

Contact Rozanna Stockman at Immanuel Lutheran School, 36 South St. Extension, Bristol, CT 06010; 860-583-5631.

Food for Thought from page 2

In an urbanizing state, many land use decisions have a dramatic impact on agriculture. *Food for Thought* presents a number of case studies that ask students to think through the consequences of making various land use decisions. As students play the role of citizens, land owners, and zoning board members, they gain a new appreciation for the complex issues that affect how land is used.

Sherrie Mantione, a teacher at a suburban elementary school in the northeastern part of the state, has used the materials in her classroom. She calls *Food for Thought* "a great resource. I'm able to bring agricultural concepts to math, science, reading, social studies – every teachable moment that presents itself throughout each day."

Food for Thought is available for \$5.50, which includes shipping, from Connecticut Ag in the Classroom, 510 Pigeon Hill Road, Windsor, CT 06095.

Spotlight

Maine Teachers of the Year Preserve History While Preserving Seeds

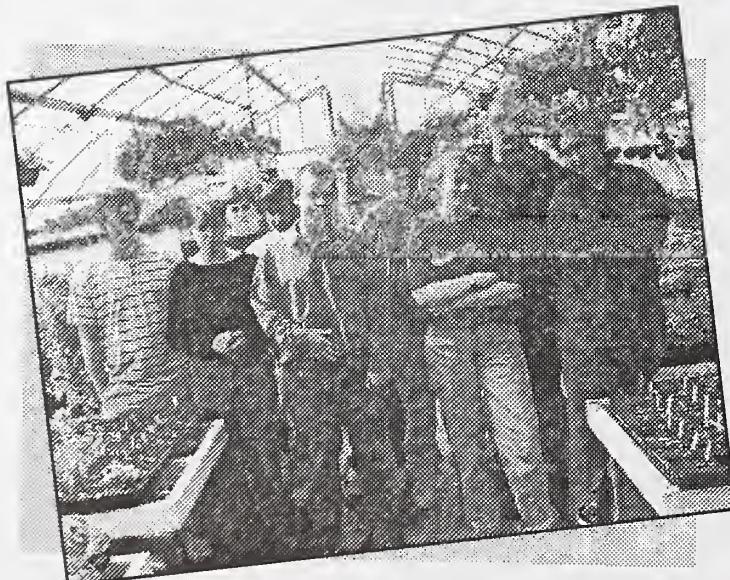
From a single seed, science teachers Neil Lash and Jon Thurston have grown a remarkable heirloom seed project that is helping students learn about botany, agriculture, and history. The Medomak Valley High School Seed Savers program is the only such high school program in the country.

"We inherited a 3,000-square-foot greenhouse from a teacher who was retiring and a Waldoboro greenneck rutabaga seed that had been preserved from the 1886 shipwreck of *The Cambridge*," Lash explains. From those small beginnings, the two teachers have created a hands-on biodiversity project that involves upper-level botany students in both scientific and historical research.

The teachers say there are two primary reasons why they launched the seed project. First, they wanted to preserve as many locally grown, open pollinated seeds as possible. "Many of these seeds have been passed down from generation to generation, and provide a wealth of information, memories, and history," notes the catalog produced by the school's seed program.

Biodiversity provides a second important reason to save seeds. "The unique genetic makeup of these seeds is the result of forces and situations that will

An interdisciplinary high school horticulture project is preserving heritage seeds in Maine.



never again be naturally duplicated," the catalog says. "Whatever the interesting qualities in the plant – taste, aesthetics, disease resistance, or ability to grow in mid-coast Maine – they are lost if the seeds are not passed on."

Through the Seed Savers Exchange in Decorah, Iowa, students have access to thousands of heirloom seeds from across the world. As they grow the seeds, they also learn about the history and culture that produced them. For example, while growing Anasazi beans, students research the Anasazi culture. They finish their study by cooking and eating a big pot of the beans. "We're preserving history and culture as well as genes," Lash says.

Students are also encouraged to bring in their own seeds. While they preserve the seeds, they also preserve their own family history through oral history projects and other research into their own family background. "They realize that great-grandma's seeds are something of great value," Lash notes. "In a time when we are losing our farm heritage and our family history, this is one way to reconnect students with their past."

One of the lessons students learn is the importance of proper isolation distances so the plants don't hybridize and contaminate the genetic pool. For example, students were interested in growing a particular squash plant – until they learned it needed a half-mile isolation distance. "Obviously, that was out of the question," Lash says.

The students have made their own heritage seeds available to others through their web site (<http://169.244.147.29/ss> or Neil_W_Lash@msad40.avcnet.org). They have sent seed packets to 34 different states and four countries.

The heritage seed project offers students a real opportunity to do something about protecting the environment, Lash points out. "When students send a dollar to save the rain forest, someone else is doing all the work," he says. "When they send in a dollar for heritage seeds, they take part in a project where they can make a real difference."

Because of their efforts, the two science teachers at Medomak Valley High School in Waldoboro have been named Teachers of the Year by the Maine Ag in the Classroom program. Contact Lash and Thurston at Medomak Valley High School, 309 Marktown Road, Waldoboro, ME 04572; 207-832-6321.

Focus on New England from page 1

Fifth grade teacher Michaela O'Brien said she took the class because it focuses on integrating science into a standards-based unit. That makes it easier to fit into her curriculum. "I like the practicality, the hands-on experience, and the opportunity to work with my colleagues," said O'Brien. "The program emphasizes a teacher-directed structure from which students can gain a lot of knowledge."

Sue Martin, who teaches third and fourth grade, said she took the class because she had always wanted a curriculum that linked the grades throughout the school and built on what teachers had done in previous years. "This course has helped me focus on how to meet the Vermont framework of standards through hands-on experiences, which is the type of activity my students and I enjoy the most," she said.

Martin said she plans to design a project in her classroom focusing on the history of the Waits River watershed, crafts, and traditions still carried on in

the area. She will bring craftspeople from the area into the classroom and link this information to gardens so students can grow their own materials for craftwork. With colleague Cheryl Ollmann, Martin is also planning a garden that will offer both inside and outside hands-on activity, using local community gardeners who will relate the students' experience to the historical role of gardening.

"We show teachers how to use the garden as a vehicle for agriculture research that benefits the community while meeting the state standards and making the information practical and meaningful to students' lives," Kiefer said. "It is so rewarding to see teachers excited about teaching food and agriculture, asking questions, and developing their own learning in preparation for gardening with children."

For more information, contact Food Works at (802) 223-1515.

This article was written by Gus Howe Johnson, coordinator for Vermont Ag in the Classroom Partners.

Massachusetts



Farm Aid Video Solves the Mystery of Growing Fruits and Vegetables

Set to the toe-tapping music of John McCutcheon, *Fresh From the Family Farm* is a 30-minute video that shows young viewers where their food comes from. In the opening scene, seven-year-old Nick and his mother are visiting an open air farmer's market. The piles of red tomatoes and great bunches of carrots should make everyone want to grab a market basket and head to the nearest farmer's market.

Nick and his mother meet Steve, a family farmer who invites them to visit his farm. There, Steven challenges Nick to play "Detective Farmer." The detective work involves finding one thing in each field that helps things grow.

By the end of the video, Nick has found the following solutions to his mystery: water, seeds, sun, air, food, time, and soil all help food grow. In each field, Nick is invited to pick a few vegetables. Young viewers who see the scenes of Nick crawling among the leafy squash and tomato plants are likely to want to grow and pick vegetables themselves.

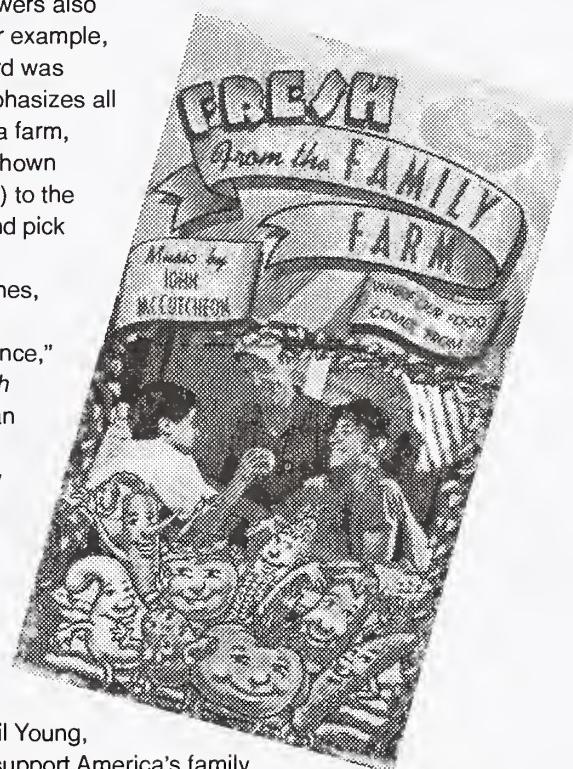
The live action sequences are occasionally interrupted by animated asides that illustrate or

expand on key points. Viewers also learn interesting facts – for example, the longest carrot on record was 6' 10". The video also emphasizes all the people needed to run a farm, from the farmer's family (shown here at the roadside stand) to the hired helpers who plant and pick the crops.

A montage of farm scenes, set to John McCutcheon's "Down at the Barnyard Dance," concludes the video. *Fresh From the Family Farm* is an excellent way to introduce younger audiences to how food moves from farm to table.

A majority of the proceeds from the sale of this video will go to Farm Aid, a nonprofit agency organized in 1985 by Willie Nelson, Neil Young, and John Mellencamp to support America's family farmers. Farm Aid raises public awareness and provides assistance to those families whose livelihood is dependent on agriculture. In the past 11 years, Farm Aid has granted over \$13 million to 100 farm organizations, churches, and service agencies in 44 states.

The video is available for \$12 by contacting Farm Aid, 334 Broadway, Suite 5, Cambridge, MA 02139 or calling 1-800-FARM-AID.



A young boy learns more about where food comes from in Fresh From the Family Farm, a video produced by Farm Aid.

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